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PROFESSOR ANDREWS GOES TO WARSAW: DECEMBER 1980

Professor Andrews represented one of the very important, very profound schools of psychology that had a real future ahead of it. Like almost all such schools, it had grown out of psychoanalysis, but had torn away from its roots and now practiced according to its own methods. It had its own history, its own phenomenology, its own dream imagery, and its own theories on raising children. Professor Andrews was at this moment flying to Poland with a bag full of books and a suitcase full of warm clothes—he had been told that Poland in December is exceptionally cold and unpleasant.

Everything was going smoothly: airplanes took off, people were talking to each other in different languages, heavy December clouds hung in the sky, ready to send winter's communion to earth, millions of white flakes of snow, each one unique. An hour earlier he had looked at himself in the mirrors at Heathrow and it had seemed to him that he looked like a traveling salesman—he remembered them from his childhood, they would go door to door selling Bibles. No matter—the school of psychology he represented warranted this kind of sales trip. Poland was a country of intelligent people. He just had to plant the seed and he would be home in a week. He would leave them the books—after all, they read English—and then they would be able to consult the authority of the Founder himself.

Sipping his drink of fine Polish vodka the stewardess brought him, he remembered the dream he'd had the night before his trip (according to the school of psychology he represented, dreams were the litmus test of reality). He had dreamed of a crow, and in the dream he had played with the big black bird. One could say—yes, he had the courage to admit it to himself—that he had petted the bird, like a

little puppy. In his school's symbological system, the crow represented change, something new and good. He ordered another drink.

The airport in Warsaw was surprisingly small and breezy. He congratulated himself for wearing his fur cap with the ear flaps, which he had gotten as a souvenir on a trip to Asia. He saw his Beatrice at once. Small and pretty, she was standing at the exit holding up a card with his name on it. They got into a miniature, beat-up car and she told him the plan for the coming week while nervously driving him around the sad, sprawling space of the city. Today was Saturday, a free day on the schedule. They would have dinner together and he could rest. Tomorrow was Sunday—a meeting at the university with students. (Yes, she said suddenly, it's a little nerve-wracking right here. He looked out the window but didn't notice anything in particular.) Then a lecture at the psychology journal, then dinner. On Monday, if he wanted, a tour of the city. On Tuesday he had a meeting with psychiatrists at some institute; he was in no state of mind to remember the specific names of these places. On Wednesday they would drive to the university in Kraków. Professor Andrews' school of psychology enjoyed great respect there. On Thursday, Auschwitz—he had requested that himself. To be in Poland and not go to Auschwitz... Then on Thursday evening they would return to Warsaw. On Friday and Saturday there were all-day workshops for practical psychologists. On Sunday, the flight home.

Only then did he realize he didn't have his suitcase with the books. They hurried back to the airport, but the bag had disappeared. The girl, her name was Gosha, went somewhere and didn't come back for half an hour. She returned without the bag. Perhaps it had been sent back to London. No problem, she said. She would come back tomorrow, it would probably turn up. Looking out the car window, he didn't hear her agitated chatter. He thought about the other things in the suitcase—underwear, clean shirts, books, xeroxes of articles.

They had a pleasant dinner with her boyfriend. His face was covered by a thick beard and glasses. He didn't speak English, which made him seem somewhat gloomy to the Professor. Professor Andrews ate a red soup made of beets with little dumplings in it and realized that this was the famous borscht his grandfather had told him about. His grandfather had been born in Łódź, in western Po-

land. The girl corrected him with a smile, he repeated after her like a child: "barsh-ch," "Woo-dzh." His tongue was helpless against these words.

He was exhausted by the time they finally took him to a residential area crowded with tall apartment buildings. They took the elevator to the top floor of one and the girl showed him the apartment. It was a small bachelor flat with a tiny kitchen wedged in between the main room and the bathroom. The corridor was so small that the three of them couldn't fit there all together. The two Poles made loud arrangements for the next day, the girl promised to bring him his suitcase. The boyfriend spoke with someone on the phone in a secretive whisper, and finally they left. Exhausted by the borscht and the alcohol, he threw himself on the bed and fell asleep. He slept restlessly. He was thirsty but didn't have the energy to get up. At some point late in the night he heard a commotion in the stairwell, slamming doors, footsteps. Or maybe he just imagined it.

He woke up and realized with dismay that it was already eleven o'clock. He looked at his rumpled clothes in distaste. He took a shower in the tiny, mildewed bathroom and then had to put his dirty underwear back on. Looking through the cupboard for some coffee, he finally found some in an old jelly jar. There wasn't a coffee maker, so he boiled water and made it in a mug. It was stale and tasted like it was brewed from tree bark. The telephone was silent. Gosha must be bringing his suitcase. Holding his cup of coffee, he looked at the books on the shelves, all in Polish, with dirty covers, harsh to the eye.

Gosha didn't call. Time passed slowly through the thick, overheated air. The Professor walked to the window and looked out at the skyline, marked by the even blocks of buildings. They were all the same color, gray, like the winter sky. Even the snow seemed gray. The sun shone unconvincingly.

There was a tank on the street. Professor Andrews opened the window, the sight was so incredible. He was certain the tank hadn't been there the night before. The frosty air bit his face. Little silhouettes swarmed around the tank, undoubtedly soldiers. He was suddenly overtaken by an uneasy feeling; maybe the coffee was too strong. He took Gosha's number from his pocket and rehearsed his

polite but assertive question: Why hadn't she called yet and what was going on with his bag?

The phone didn't have a dial tone. He dialed the number several times. Then he dialed a number in England—the same. He tried all the phone numbers he could remember. The phone was broken, but he remembered the bearded boyfriend using it yesterday. He quickly got dressed and took the elevator down to the street. After an hour of wandering among the apartment blocks (they all looked the same to him), he finally found another phone, but realized he didn't have any Polish coins. Only two bills, and he didn't even know what they were worth. He set out to find a place where he could get change, but the only little store he found appeared to be closed. It was Sunday. He thought with horror that it had not been wise to leave the apartment; she was certainly trying to find him, maybe she was waiting for him. He decided to go back and realized he was lost. He didn't know which of the buildings was his. He didn't remember the address. What foolishness. What a country. He saw an old couple walking arm in arm and headed toward them. But what should he ask them, and in what language? They passed by him, looking away.

He staggered between the buildings, more and more frozen and desperate. He didn't even notice when it began to get dark. By some miracle he stumbled upon the tank, in front of which there now burned a fire in a metal trash can. The soldiers, machine guns slung over their shoulders, warmed their hands over the fire. He felt a kind of atavistic fear and quickly backed away into an unlit park, but it was because of the tank that he was able to locate his building—he remembered the view from his window. With relief he found himself in his strange apartment and locked the door behind him. It was six o'clock; his lecture was just starting. Without him. Or maybe with him, actually, maybe this was a dream, maybe this was some kind of strange state of consciousness brought about by fatigue, the flight, the weather, or who knows what else. His school of psychology recognized such things.

He looked in the refrigerator and found a hardened piece of yellow cheese, a container of liverwurst, butter, and two eggs. At the sight of the food, Professor Andrews' stomach seized control of his actions. An omelet was soon sizzling in a pan. The best present the

Professor found on this, the strangest day of his life, was the bottle of Johnny Walker he had bought at Heathrow. He poured himself half a glass and drank it in almost one swallow.

The next day he woke up early, when the sky was just growing gray. He lay naked in his bed—he had decided not to sleep in his underwear, who knew how long it had to last him. He waited until seven and delicately lifted the telephone receiver. Nothing. The phone hadn't fixed itself, although the Professor had allowed himself that childish hope. Sometimes strange things happen with reality, which is ultimately just a projection of the psyche (so his school of psychology taught). He drew a bath and, lying in the pleasant heat, came up with a plan of action. Buy a map, find the embassy. Then everything will be simple. And go shopping, he must eat a proper meal. Full of vigor, he got dressed and went down to the street. He walked in the direction of the tank—it was probably on a main street. The tank wasn't there. Instead, armored cars drove by, one after another, with a sinister drone. Passersby watched the cars with strange looks on their faces. He energetically accosted one of them, a man about his age carrying a very full mesh bag. Immediately, looking at him, the Professor realized the man didn't understand him. He nonetheless finished asking his question. The man shrugged his shoulders helplessly. The Professor politely excused himself and went on toward where he thought he heard the noise of a lot of cars. He found himself by a two-lane road. Periodically a car would pass by, or a red bus. He didn't know where they stopped, where they were going, or even whether he was downtown or in the outskirts of the city.

He decided to trust his instincts—that was one of the most important premises of the school of psychology he represented, to obey your instinct, your intuition, premonitions. He walked along the sidewalk, feeling the cold, until he reached a square from which a number of streets radiated out. It was suspiciously empty, as if it were a holiday. But it was Monday. Or Tuesday? With excitement he noticed a familiar word among the infrequent shop signs: BAR. He opened the door and for a moment didn't see anything, because the lenses of his glasses were covered with a milky layer of steam. He wiped them with his handkerchief and saw a gloomy room with few shabby tables. An old, toothless woman sat at one of them. She wasn't eating any-

thing, just sitting and staring at the windowpane. Behind the counter stood a large girl in a dingy apron. There wasn't a trace of anything to eat anywhere; he thought that maybe the word "bar" meant something different in Polish than in English. He cleared his throat uncertainly. The girl asked him something. He asked if he could get something to eat. She looked at him in astonishment, not understanding. After a moment of awkward silence, he pointed at his open mouth with his finger. "Eat. Eat food," he said. The girl hesitated a moment, then disappeared behind a swinging door. She returned with another woman, older than she. Embarrassed, he repeated his simple gesture. The women began to talk to each other quickly and animatedly. They pointed him toward a table and after a moment served him: one brought him soup, the other a plate of some strange-looking dumplings. They stood over him for a minute until they were sure that the food was disappearing into his mouth. It was bad, tasteless, but it eased the Professor's hunger. He stirred the dumplings on his plate with his aluminum fork, from time to time uselessly wiping his mouth with a paper napkin as thin and as absorbent as rice paper. He finished and walked up to the counter, giving the girl one of his bills. She gave him a lot of change, at least he thought so, several bills and a lot of coins. Feeling wretched and ridiculous, he went out onto the street, wanting to forget that BAR. He wished he were back at home on the eleventh floor, surely the telephone was working by now. He saw a bus pass by and stop several yards away from him. People got on and off listlessly. On a sudden impulse the Professor jumped on the bus. They set off. And all at once he felt himself grow warm, because the bus didn't go at all in the direction he thought it would. It turned smartly around the square and went through a short tunnel, and then suddenly they were on a bridge. Professor Andrews saw the river below and ice-floes slowly floating down it. It seemed to him that people were looking at him malevolently. He tried to calm himself, not letting himself admit that the bus's unexpected behavior frightened him. Besides that, he didn't have a ticket to punch. If there were soldiers on the streets, then maybe he could go to prison for not having a ticket. Yes, he had heard of such cases, where people had ended up in prison in Asia, forever. With relief, he got off the bus at the next stop and immediately set out back in the direction of the

square. The wind was blowing terribly. He had to tie the straps of his earflaps under his chin. He felt his nose begin to freeze. Finally, he made it to the square and found the road home. He quickened his pace, almost running. He couldn't feel his fingers from the cold. Seeing a window display which was more lit up than the others, he walked up to it, more because he missed light and colors than for any other reason. It was a store, an ordinary store, with lots of colorful things for sale on the shelves. Through the protective grating he saw alcohol with well-known labels, cans, sweets, clothing, toys. It wasn't late yet, but the store was already closed. He tried to make out the little sign with the store's hours on it. He realized that the store was supposed to be open now, but it was closed. He looked through the glass, disappointed. While he was standing there, a man passed by carrying a pitiful looking pine tree. He said something to the Professor and smiled. The Professor returned the smile, but the man walked on and disappeared.

A man carrying a tree. It was some kind of omen, the Professor didn't know of what, because he was no longer accustomed to clear, psychosymbolic thought. Snatches of incomplete emotions raced through is mind instead. Anger, for example, which immediately dissolved into childish distress. And then he was suddenly overcome by quiet, internal laughter. Demonic. Professor Andrews was a master at observing his own emotions, he had studied them for a long time. Here, however, this skill seemed to be completely useless to him. He further realized that for two whole days he hadn't formed a single rational sentence, besides the one he had spoken to that man on the street, and that pathetic "Eat. Eat food."

The next day, after he had confirmed that the phone still didn't work, he found a small store in his neighborhood that was open. For the first time in his life, the Professor was hungry. This store was unusual. It only had bottles with some kind of clear liquid in them, maybe vodka, and jars of mustard. And of beet salad, carefully arranged on the shelves. He knew he had to buy whatever they had. Just as he was leaving, they brought in some bread and the store was filled with people in a matter of minutes. He stood in line and the clerk handed him a loaf without speaking. He paid and left. Not wanting to go back to the empty, stuffy apartment right away, he felt him-

self attracted to the lines snaking along the sidewalks. He stood near some metal tables set up right on the sidewalk, where people were lined up obediently. He looked at their faces and tried to find Gosha among them, maybe she was here somewhere. The people were ominously silent. They were serious, tired-looking, like they hadn't slept well the night before. They tapped their feet impatiently. The most gloomy race on earth. But in spite of that he stood among them. No, not because he needed them—they were so *uncivilized*—but because ordinary human warmth radiated from them. Their breath melted the icy air. He watched as tightly-bundled saleswomen fished handsome gray carp out of barrels. They threw them onto scales. The fish flopped around in the cold trays. The fishmongers sang out the same question to each person in line, like a refrain, a mantra. Professor Andrews' ear grabbed onto the melody of this hymn and now it rang in his head. "Zhivo chi na maystsu?" he heard the women ask, over and over. The Professor could only guess at its meaning. When someone nodded affirmatively, the women would hit the fish in the head with a weight. The fish found their final resting place in gaping string bags. "Zhivo chi na maystsu?" "Alive or dead?"

He felt an icy thrill. He had the impression that he was taking part in a religious ritual. The Killing of the Fish. "Zhivo chi na mayscu?" The repetition of the words hypnotized him. Without warning, he felt a strong desire to join in this savage repetition and walk away with a dead fish in a bag, like everyone else. Unconsciously, he got in line, but when he saw a group of four soldiers with a dog approach, he came back to his senses. People silently turned their eyes away from the soldiers. They looked down at their feet or somewhere off in the distance. The Professor thought dismally of his London office, of his books, and the warm gas fireplace.

In the parking lot of his apartment building they were selling Christmas trees. There was a line, but it was much smaller than the one for the fish. So he bought a tree. He carried it home under his arm, looking just like everyone else. He was suddenly joyful. He started to whistle. He went up to his apartment, sat down while still in his coat and hat and opened the bottle of clear liquid. It was vinegar. My God, he thought, this can't possibly be happening. I'm having a psychotic episode. Something bad has happened to me. He tried

to pinpoint the moment when it all might have started, but his mind resisted. All he could think of was the tasty sandwich he ate on the plane.

The Professor was himself surprised by how much he was thinking about food. His mind accepted such primitive thoughts awkwardly—he was used to them settling down in him, like abstract notions on a comfortable sofa. But now the Professor's memory was obsessed with the shape of the store behind the grating, with its shelves full of merchandise. It's funny, unprecedented, the Professor thought, at first amused and then truly afraid. How can this be happening to me? He leaned the tree against a wall and looked at its delicate branches. Reluctantly he realized that he had to do something. He had to act.

He packed his things, turned out the light, took one last look at the entryway and slammed the door. He took the elevator downstairs and forced himself to put the key to the apartment in the mailbox. He was decided. He had to find the embassy. There was no other way. In front of the building he bumped into a man with a fat, red face, shoveling snow despite the cold. The man bowed and said something, probably hello. Professor Andrews felt an unexpected burst of energy and, heedless of nothing, shocking himself even, began to tell the man about the past two days. That he was staying on the top floor because he came from London to give some lectures, that his guide was supposed to call but the phone was broken, that there was a tank on the street, the closed store, the bus, the tree, the vinegar in his glass. The man stood and watched his mouth attentively. His face showed no expression.

Somehow he found himself in a small apartment brimming with knick-knacks. It was hard to move around in it. He sat at a low table, drank weak tea from a glass in a plastic holder, and lifted shots to his lips, one after another. The vodka had a strange, fruity taste. It was so strong that after every swallow the Professor felt his gullet clench. He heard himself telling the man and his wife (she had appeared, fat and pink, with a hot sausage arranged appetizingly on a plate) about his school of psychology, about the Founder, about premonitions and how the human ego worked. And then he suddenly became anxious—he remembered the Embassy, and began to mumble over and over

again "embassy, British embassy, embassy." "War," the man answered him in English, and clutched at the air in such a way that a machine gun practically materialized in his hands. The man crouched down, squinted his eyes and made noises imitating gunfire. He shot at the fern-covered walls. "War," he repeated. The Professor shakily stood up to go to the bathroom, and found himself in the door to the kitchen. On the table there was some kind of complicated chemical apparatus, full of pipes and faucets. His stomach lurched from the strong smell, reminiscent of the vodka he had just drunk. A gentle push from his host put him in the direction of the toilet. The Professor closed the door behind him, and when he turned around he saw a huge fish swimming in the bathtub. It was alive. He didn't trust his eyes. He clutched the button on his pants and looked into its flat, underwater eye. He felt trapped in its gaze. The fish moved its tail slowly. Laundry was drying on racks above the tub. He stood there for probably fifteen minutes, unable to move, until his worried host started to knock on the door. "Sshhhh...," the Professor quieted him. He and the fish gazed at each other. It was at once frightening and pleasant, completely rational and at the same time totally absurd. He was afraid and also, in some strange way, happy. The fish was alive. It moved. It pronounced some unheard words with its thick lips. Professor Andrews leaned against the wall and closed his eyes. Oh, to stay in this tiny bathroom, in the stomach of this huge apartment building, in the center of this great, frozen city, to be stripped of language, unable to understand or be understood. To look into the very center of that flat, miraculously round fish eye. Not to move from this place.

The door opened with a clatter and the Professor fell into the strong, warm arms of the man. He hugged him like a child and sobbed.

Later they were driving through the sunlit city in a taxi. Professor Andrews clutched his bag in his lap. When he said good-bye to the fat man at the gate of the Embassy, the man kissed his unshaven cheeks three times. What could the Professor say to him in farewell? He took a moment to position his disobedient, drunken tongue, and then whispered uncertainly, "Zhivo chi na maystsu?" The Pole looked at him in surprise. "Zhivo." he answered. Alive.

Translated by Kim Jastremski